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Becoming a parent has transformed the way I understand God's love.

Inspire (for parents)

As a follower of Jesus, I've always been in awe of His extraordinary and supernatural sacrifice on the cross. Giving one's life—not just for one man or woman, but for all of mankind—is the ultimate expression of love. After I became a parent, this concept really hit home.

When my son was born, I thought he was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. This kind of love has to be God-given, because newborns aren't that easy to look at (if you've ever seen a human being moments after birth, then you know what I'm talking about: smashed-up face, body covered in muck, wrinkled flesh—it isn't pretty).

I remember holding his tiny body close to my chest. The delivery room was abuzz, but in that moment, it was just my little boy and me. The earth stood still as I stared lovingly at this new bundle. As the days turned into weeks and then months, my love grew exponentially. Then one sunny spring afternoon, I came to a life-changing realization. "I would take a bullet for this kid," I told myself. "I love him so unconditionally, so unapologetically, so infinitely. There's

nothing this child can do to make me love him less ..."

Becoming a parent has transformed the way I understand God's love. I truly feel the depth of it. I identify with its boundlessness. I am humbled by God's singular act of this kind of love: the sacrifice of His only Son, Jesus Christ.

Parenthood paves the way, every single day, for me to receive the good news. I love my son (and newborn daughter) with abandon. I can only imagine how much more my heavenly Father loves me.

by Jennifer Cho Salaff

Getting Started

Scripture: Luke 3:1–20; Mark 1:1–8; Matthew 3:1–11 (John the Baptist Prepares the Way)

Main Point: God Gets Us Ready for the Good News

This resource is designed to allow your family to have time in God's Word **before your children attend church**. Because God's plan is for parents to be the primary spiritual nurturers of their children's faith, we know that as you grow spiritually, your children will grow spiritually as well.

Equip (for parents)

God used John the Baptist to prepare the way for the good news of Jesus. Before he began preaching and baptizing, the world had not heard the voice of a prophet for 400 years. God promised to send a Savior but the people had to wait for Him to come. They waited and waited and waited, and because they waited for so long, most of the people forgot about the promised Savior.

John distinguished himself from the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees, whose luxurious homes, positions of authority, and flowing robes reflected their great pride in their rank. He lived in the wilderness, his clothes were woven from camel hair, and he ate locusts and wild honey. John's striking appearance reinforced the striking message he proclaimed.

From Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley to every section of Judea, people gathered to hear his message of repentance. The word *repent* means "to change one's mind and act on that change." As repentance—turning from sins—happens internally, John used baptism as a visible sign that a person had decided to change his life. It was a public declaration of a commitment to give up a sinful and selfish way of living.

When John challenged people to confess sin individually, he signaled the start of a new way to relate to God. He dared people to move out of their routines, beyond their natural abilities and desires, to step into a relationship with the living God. He was preparing people to respond to Jesus. The good news began with the message John was chosen to deliver.

This message was the bridge between law and grace. John's baptism with water prepared the people to receive Christ's message. What John began, Jesus finished.

REMEMBER VERSE

I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.
Philippians 4:13 (NLT)

Support (for parents & kids)

> JUST FOR FUN this week, read this passage of Scripture while eating breakfast. Why not add honey to your meal, maybe on toast or a muffin? Talk with your children about how breakfast is a meal that prepares you for your day. Share with them that you're going to read about someone in The Big God Story who prepared the way for Jesus. Together, read the account of John the Baptist preparing the way in **Mark 1:1–11**.

When you're finished reading, ask them what was different about John the Baptist. Ask them how they think John prepared the way for Jesus. Talk with them about what God said from heaven about Jesus after He was baptized.

Share with your children that what they just heard is a part of The Big God Story in the Bible, and they'll hear it in church this week. Now might be a good time to pray with your children. Ask them what is on their hearts and join in prayer together.